

## **Teacher Sexual Misconduct: Grooming Patterns and Female Offenders**

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*Educator sexual misconduct has received increasing attention over the past decade. The attention has exposed a number of concerning issues, including a lack of formal research in the area and difficulties in recognizing and prosecuting cases. Public responses to high profile cases of sexual misconduct involving female teachers suggest that gender-biased views on sex offenders remain prominent in society. This article will review the literature on female teacher sexual misconduct in addition to what is known about grooming patterns and warning signs. Finally, current dilemmas in resolving cases of educator sexual misconduct will be discussed, and basic prevention strategies will be recommended.*

**KEYWORDS** *educator sexual abuse, female sex offenders, boundary violations, student victimization*

There is no doubt that teachers have a profound effect on the lives of their students. The student-teacher connection can create positive, transforming possibilities for the student (Gillespie, 2005). Conversely, the power imbalance present in this influential relationship may be abused, resulting in long-term trauma for the student. This is particularly the case for some sex offenders who use the profession of teaching to target victims (Sullivan & Beech, 2002). The topic of sexual abuse of students by their teachers has slowly been receiving increasing scrutiny. Most notably, there has been increased media focus on female teachers who have sexual relationships with their students.

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The case of Mary Kay Letourneau captured national attention when she was convicted of second degree child rape for having sex with her sixth grade student, Vili Fualaau, when he was 12 years old. Ms. Letourneau, who was 35 years old at the time, pleaded guilty and received a seven and a half year sentence, which was suspended contingent on her completion of sex offender treatment and an 80 day jail sentence. At the time of her conviction in 1997, she had already given birth to Fualaau's daughter. In 1998, she was given prison time for violating her conditional release by having contact with Mr. Fualaau. Ms. Letourneau subsequently had another child by her former student and eventually married him when she was released from prison.

High profile cases such as this have led to public outrage and inquiries into school credentialing procedures and termination practices for teachers (Schultz, 2005). The subject has fueled public debate over whether female teacher sex offenders receive more lenient sentences than their male equivalents (Saletan, 2006). While there is no clear answer to this question at present, some have noted a distinct difference in how female teacher sex offender's crimes are described when compared to male teacher sex offender crimes. For example, it has been reported that the female offender's actions are commonly described as a "well-meaning," harmless initiation into sexuality (Denove, 2001). In a study of college students, men reported viewing female teacher-male student sexual relationships more positively than male teacher-female student sexual relationships (Fromuth & Holt, 2008; Fromuth, Holt, & Parker, 2001). Thus, there would appear to be some strong sociocultural biases at play in how such sexually abusive relationships are perceived.

To date there are extremely few national level studies of educator sexual abuse. This is in spite of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which called for a national study of sexual abuse in schools. At present, most data on educator sexual abuse has come from newspaper reports. Shakeshaft (2003) performed a secondary analysis of data collected for the American Association of University Women (AAUW). These data were drawn from a list of 80,000 schools surveyed in the fall of 2000 (AAUW, 2001). The analysis revealed that 9.6% of all students in grades 8-11 reported educator sexual abuse. It is interesting to consider the possible global nature of the problem, as 8% of secondary school students in Israel reported being sexually maltreated by school staff (Khoury-Kassabri, 2006).

In an extensive synthesis of existing literature (Shakeshaft, 2004), the Ontario College of Teachers definition of educator sexual misconduct was used: "any behavior of a sexual nature which may constitute professional misconduct" (Ontario College of Teachers, 2002, p. 1). The perpetrators of educator sexual abuse were described as falling into two distinct patterns: (a) abusers with victims younger than seventh grade and (b) abusers with victims in late middle and high school (Shakeshaft, 2003). The abusers of children younger than seventh grade had a distinctly different public persona

and modus operandi than those who abuse older children. Educators targeting elementary school children were often high achievers in the profession who had been recognized with awards for their teaching efforts (Shakeshaft, 2004). The popularity and trust evoked by these educators may perplex school officials and community members when allegations of sexual misconduct are made. As a further complication, the teacher's professional reputation may result in a tendency to dismiss or ignore allegations. It was theorized that this type of abuser works at being recognized as a good teacher to secure trust and an irreproachable reputation in furtherance of his or her goal of sexual misconduct. For example, in Texas a well-regarded band director had been convicted of sexual misconduct with a student; it was found that he kept decades worth of pictures and notes as trophies (Henry, Griffith, & Goulas, 2006).

In contrast, educators who teach at the late middle and high school level target victims in this age range. They might be outstanding teachers, although they may also be mediocre (Shakeshaft, 2003). Sexual abuse at this level may be less premeditated and planned and more often a result of bad judgment (Shakeshaft, 2004). For example, a recent case in New York State involved a married 33-year-old teacher who was abusing substances. The teacher reported feeling flattered that one of her 15-year-old male students found her attractive. Their affair "became public when the highly intoxicated teacher announced it to students and others nearby during a school basketball game" (Ramirez, 2007).

The majority of educators who abuse are classroom teachers (18%). The next most common abusers are coaches (15%), but bus drivers, administrators, and others affiliated with the school may also offend (Shakeshaft, 2003). Most sexual abuse of students by adults occurs in the school in empty classrooms, hallways, and in offices. It is common for teachers to target vulnerable or marginal students who feel especially gratified by the extra attention.

## FEMALE PERPETRATORS

Most attention has focused on male teachers as the primary perpetrators; however, the scenario of female teachers sexually abusing their students is receiving increasing recognition (Thomas, 1999). In a study of 471 female offenders in Texas, most (88%) were Caucasian (Vandiver & Kercher, 2004). The authors reported finding six types of female sex offenders; however, the most common type was the "heterosexual nurturer," who was least likely to have an arrest for sexual assault. Another study followed up on this typology by examining 390 female sex offenders registered in New York State. It was concluded that female sex offenders on the whole are a heterogeneous group (Sandler & Freeman, 2007). A typology of "teacher/lover" has been proposed for the adult female who views herself as emotionally equal

to her teenage male victim (or female if the perpetrator is homosexual) (Matthews, Matthews, & Speltz, 1991). The victim of this type of offender is most commonly a troubled or needy adolescent seeking attention. The perpetrator conceptualizes the behavior as a “consensual” love affair and often has difficulty seeing her actions as inappropriate.

## GENERAL SEX OFFENDER GROOMING PATTERNS

“Grooming” is a term used to describe the process by which sex offenders carefully initiate and maintain sexually abusive relationships with children. Grooming is a conscious, deliberate, and carefully orchestrated approach used by the offender. The goal of grooming is to permit a sexual encounter and keep it a secret. The grooming process encompasses a variety of methods used by the offender during the preparatory stage of sexual abuse (Mcalindon, 2006). In addition, the methods help maintain the abusive relationship by ensuring the complicity and secrecy of the victim.

Offenders carefully groom victims by systematically separating them from family and peers (Lawson, 2003). Once isolated, victims are more easily exploited and manipulated into sexual relationships. Ninety-one child sex offenders who were not educators were interviewed about how they selected and maintained their victims (Elliot, Browne, & Kilcoyne, 1995). Offenders reported using a variety of methods to select a victim and to establish and maintain the sexual relationship. Victims were often selected because the offender perceived them as vulnerable, isolated, and/or emotionally needy. Table 1 provides a list of sex offenders’ common grooming strategies.

Offenders may also rely on a victim’s natural sexual curiosity or feed into a victim’s feeling of being unloved or unappreciated. A study of 97 child sex offenders who were not educators revealed that the grooming process relies heavily on the offender gaining the trust of the victim (Bennell, Alison, Stein, Alison, & Canter, 2001). This often involves the offender exploiting the adult-child power imbalance in a variety of ways. Many child sex offenders believed that a “special relationship” was vital to obtaining victim compliance. For example, one offender stated, “I have to feel as if I am important and special to the child and giving the child the love she needs and isn’t getting” (Elliott et al., 1995, p. 579). Once a trusting or special relationship is created, the offender may carefully test the victim’s reaction to sex. This may be done by bringing up sexual matters in discussion, leaving sexually oriented materials out where the victim can see them, and by subtly increasing sexual touching. In this way, the offender attempts to “normalize” sex and desensitize the victim.

During the maintenance phase, the offender may use a variety of strategies to ensure secrecy. For example, one offender stated, “Secrecy and blame

**TABLE 1** Sex Offender Grooming Strategies

Targeting:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vulnerable (e.g., low self-confidence, low self-esteem)</li> <li>• Less parental oversight</li> <li>• Socially isolated or emotionally needy</li> </ul>
Strategies:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caretaking (e.g., babysitting, teaching, tutoring)</li> <li>• Form “special relationship”</li> <li>• Become welcome in home/gain trust of parents</li> <li>• Gifts, games, special times</li> <li>• Isolate</li> <li>• Seize on feelings of being unloved/unappreciated</li> <li>• Emotional bonding and trust building</li> <li>• Desensitize to sex (e.g., talking, pictures, pornographic videos)</li> <li>• Use pretense (“teaching,” “exploring,” “closeness”)</li> <li>• Exploit victim’s natural sexual curiosity or uncertainty</li> </ul>
Maintenance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bribes, gifts to ensure continued compliance</li> <li>• Threaten dire consequences to ensure secrecy</li> <li>• Threaten to blame victim</li> <li>• Threaten loss of “loving” relationship</li> </ul>

*Source:* Elliot, Browne, & Kilcoyne (1995).

were my best weapons. Most kids worry that they are to blame for the abuse and that they should keep it a secret” (Elliott et al., 1995, p. 579). In addition, offenders may use intimidation, bribes, or threats to maintain secrecy (Shakeshaft, 2004). Paradoxically, the offender may represent the closest relationship the victim has, particularly if the victim is socially isolated or emotionally vulnerable. In such cases, the victim may be reticent to give up what he or she views as a “loving” relationship.

## EDUCATOR SEXUAL ABUSE GROOMING PATTERNS

One of the central ethical themes of educator sexual abuse is the violation of professional boundaries. Research suggests that teachers generally recognize the importance of student-teacher boundary violations. In a study of teachers’ opinions on ethical standards, teachers rated boundary violations as the single most serious ethical violation (Barrett, Headly, Stovall, & Witte, 2006). For educator sexual abusers, the process of grooming begins when an abuser selects a victim and subsequently employs a series of methods designed to “seduce” the student (Robins, 2000). Victim selection in educator sexual abuse is influenced by the compliance of the student and the likelihood of secrecy (Shakeshaft, 2003). Offenders tend to target students who they can control. The sexual and psychological exploitation occurs within the perpetrator’s subtle agenda of grooming and enticement. Most children respond to positive attention from an educator, and the praise of teachers

can be quite influential (Nicaise, Bois, Fairclough, Amorose, & Cogerino, 2007). However, students who are estranged from their parents or who are experiencing some type of emotional difficulty are often targeted not only because they might be responsive but also because they may be more likely to maintain silence (Shakeshaft, 2003).

The teacher may begin grooming by giving the student special attention, support, or rewards. The power of such rewards to affect the student should not be underestimated. Rewards from a teacher may have a crucial impact on the student's motivation and cognitions. Students' reward histories are significantly related to their future motivation and performance (Davis, Winsler, & Middleton, 2006). Rewarding for the purposes of grooming may take place in the context of providing the student with additional help, mentoring, advisement on a project, or opportunities for overnight outings. As this takes place, the teacher is slowly introducing and increasing sexually related discourse. Next, the amount of touching and physical contact is gradually increased. The purpose of grooming is to test the child's ability to maintain secrecy and to desensitize the child through progressive sexual behaviors.

The teacher may strive to provide the student with experiences that are valuable so that the student will be reticent to lose the relationship. Grooming may also involve the parents of the victim so that the offender can better gain their approval and trust. This will allow the offender to have greater access to the victim and enhanced ability to isolate the victim on outings. It is not uncommon for parents to be appreciative of the extra attention from the teacher, who they perceive as a positive authority figure and role model to their child. Grooming patterns must be better understood if educator sexual misconduct is to be prevented or detected (Shakeshaft, 2003). Table 2 provides a list of some potential warning signs of educator sexual misconduct.

**TABLE 2** Potential Warning Signs of Educator Sexual Misconduct

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- Obvious or inappropriate preferential treatment of a student
- Excessive time spent alone with a student
- Excessive time spent with student outside of class
- Repeated time spent in private spaces with a student
- Driving a student to or from school
- Befriending parents and making visits to their home
- Acting as a particular student's "confidante"
- Giving small gifts, cards, letters to a student
- Inappropriate calls or e-mails to a student
- Overly affectionate behavior with student
- Flirtatious behavior or off-color remarks around a student
- Other students suspect, make jokes or references

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Sources: "Districts Should Appoint" (2006); Shakeshaft (2004); Sutton (2004).

## EFFECTS OF EDUCATOR SEXUAL ABUSE

There is a large body of research on the adverse effects of childhood sexual abuse, yet there has been little focus on the long-term results of sexual abuse by educators. Findings that childhood sexual abuse is a strong predictor of suicidality (Bebbington et al., 2009; Moskowitz, 2001), depression, and low self-esteem (Griffing et al., 2006) would seem to hold for victims of educator abuse as well. Some have observed that educator sexual abuse has dynamics similar to incest, and the abuse results in a loss of trust in adults and authority figures (Finkelhor & Hashimma, 2001). Victims also have difficulty forming future intimate relationships and suffer from a sense of betrayal and shame. Some abused students report that the abuse was particularly harmful because their trust was betrayed by someone whom they admired, saw as an authority figure, and felt comfortable confiding in.

Not surprisingly, the child victim's self-blame and guilt predicts self-reported symptoms of depression, poor social efficacy, and general abuse-related fears (Ligezinska et al., 1996). The psychological pain and struggles of the child invariably affect the parents (Modrcin & Robison, 1991). Parents of children who have been victims of educator sexual abuse may suffer from intense guilt and emotional distress, which may impair their ability to effectively respond to their child's postabuse needs. Thus, there is a need to expand the clinical and research focus beyond child victims to the traumatized families (Manion et al., 1998).

In some cases, the victim may not be a student in the abusing teacher's class. The victim may simply be a student at the school where the educator holds a position of trust and responsibility (Shakeshaft, 2003). Within schools, teachers and other members of school staff have power over students, and students are taught from an early age to trust teachers. The abuse of power theory emphasizes that power hierarchies naturally put supervisors in a position to misuse their authority. A study focusing on this theory compared similarities and disparities between sexual harassment of students perpetrated by teachers and by peers (Timmerman, 2003). The study involved 2,808 randomly selected adolescents at 22 secondary schools from two regions in the Netherlands and found that students felt less comfortable and reported more psychosomatic health problems when harassed by a teacher.

In considering the broader societal effects, there are the potential implicit lessons that may be transmitted to students. Teachers play an important role in transmitting cultural norms and values to students, and they are expected to have a pedagogical relationship with their students. Thus, teachers serve as important behavioral models. In particular, they serve as models for acceptable social interactions. There is the risk that sexual misconduct by teachers will imply to students that this behavior is normative and/or acceptable. Even if not directly abused, there is the possibility that the student, having "learned his or her lesson," will carry this attitude into the adult work force.

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Sexual abuse in New York City Public Schools cost taxpayers approximately \$18.7 million over a recent five-year period (Campanile & Montero, 2001). Yet it is speculated that many cases go undetected, as few students tell adults and authorities about the abuse (Shakeshaft & Cohan, 1994). Only about 6% of students report sexual abuse by a teacher or other staff member to someone who can do something about it (Denove, 2001).

Another dilemma involves questionable or inadequate sanctions. In a study of 225 cases of educator sexual abuse in New York, none of the abusers were reported to authorities and only 1% lost the license to teach (Shakeshaft & Cohan, 1995). While all 225 accused admitted to physical sexual abuse of a student, only 35% suffered any negative consequences (15% were terminated and 20% received a formal reprimand or suspension), and 25% received no consequence or were spoken to informally. Approximately 39% choose to leave the district. Most of these individuals left with retirement packages or positive recommendations. Of the 54% who were terminated or retired, 16% were teaching in other schools. While the status of the other 84% was unknown, it has been observed that teachers who sexually abuse students may go on to abuse again (Zernel & Twedt, 1999). A nationwide Associated Press (2007) investigation found 2,570 cases from 2001 to 2005 in which educators were punished following allegations of sexual misconduct. Over the course of five years, the number of cases involving state action steadily increased (Associated Press, 2007).

Attempts to prevent educator sexual abuse will most certainly have to deal with there being no clear central authority for tracking teachers accused of sexual misconduct. Thus, they may leave one jurisdiction only to resume teaching in another. A national bulletin board run by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification lists teachers whose licenses have been revoked or suspended; however, reporting is inconsistent (Schemo, 2002). One Internet news site has an extensive list of over 90 female teachers who have been accused or convicted of sexual misconduct with students (<http://www.worldnetdaily.com>).

Disciplinary actions against teachers often take lengthy periods of time. Educators accused of sexual misconduct may use defamation suits as a threat against employers. Teacher background checks typically go through the FBI and cover only felonies. These background checks will miss many sexual abuse charges that are reduced to misdemeanors through plea bargains or other negotiations. Offending teachers are able to retain their teaching certification and abilities as they go through the appeal process. This allows them to move to another state and use their certificates to get new teaching jobs and begin the cycle again.

In states with serious teacher shortages, school districts experience pressure to quickly provide credentials to teachers. When this occurs, important warning signs or employment records may not be adequately scrutinized. In

a case from New York, a man was sentenced to a minimum of 14 years for molesting two brothers, 8 and 10 years old, in their home. The Connecticut school district that had fired him over sexual abuse accusations gave him excellent recommendations to the New York school district (Moskowitz, 2001).

When charges of sexual abuse cannot be clearly established, school officials sometimes conclude that there was an "improper relationship" between the educator and student. However, this important information may not be passed on or may be intentionally withheld. Even in cases where sexual misconduct was clearly established, school districts have been known to rid themselves of the problem by agreeing to keep quiet if the teacher moves on without initiating a civil suit against the school district (Moskowitz, 2001). This practice has been called "passing the trash" and avoids the difficulties of criminal prosecution or protracted disciplinary proceedings. The districts that have subsequently hired the abusers have begun suing the original districts for civil damages in those cases where the teacher was caught abusing students again. Additionally, when the victim's parents discover that the teacher had a past history of abuse that was or should have been known, there is an increased probability that they will seek legal restitution.

A salient and sometimes overlooked problem is the effect of abuse allegations on the school environment. It is not uncommon for teachers and parents in the school district to be greatly disturbed, not only by the allegations but also by the devastation caused in the life of a well-liked teacher (McGrath, 1994). This has the unfortunate effect of creating a climate of fear among teachers, who may find themselves reducing contact with their students. In a study of 515 New York State teachers, the fear of abuse allegations was found to be a significant issue (Anderson & Levine, 1999). The majority of teachers (70%) advised against hugging or putting an arm around a student. In the wake of a teacher sexual abuse scandal, it may take the school district many years to recover from the stigma and to restore a pleasant work environment.

## CASE EXAMPLE AND DISCUSSION

The following vignette describes the case of a female teacher sex offender who targeted a 15-year-old girl in her class.

Ms. T was a 35-year-old high school physical education teacher. When not teaching physical education or coaching the girls' basketball team, Ms. T would supervise a 10th grade study hall period. Ms. T's sexual orientation was lesbian, although she was not open about this with her teaching peers.

Ms. S was a 15-year-old student who played on the girls' basketball team and was also in Ms. T's study hall. Ms. S's parents had been divorced for two years, and Ms. S had struggled emotionally since that time. Ms. S suffered from feelings of sadness and worthlessness and felt neglected by her mother,

who had been actively dating. Although she had interest in dating boys her age, her low self-esteem caused her to shy away from going to social events where she would be likely to meet them.

One day after basketball practice, Ms. T struck up a conversation with Ms. S during which Ms. T was very complimentary of Ms. S's athletic ability. The conversation lasted several hours and touched on a variety of other topics, such as Ms. S's post-high school plans. The conversation eventually led to a discussion of how Ms. S was coping with her parent's divorce. The following week, Ms. T gave Ms. S permission to leave study hall and go to a nearby coffee house so she could bring back coffee and pastries for Ms. T. Over the following months, their after-practice conversations became routine, as did the special permission to leave study hall.

Ms. T and Ms. S began meeting on the weekends for extra technique and strength training at a local gym. This progressed to regular lunches afterward. Ms. S told her mother that Ms. T believed she could win a basketball scholarship to college but that it would require more intensive, private training. Ms. S's mother was happy and relieved to see her daughter's self-esteem and mood improving and encouraged her daughter to invite Ms. T over for dinner one evening. After meeting Ms. T, Ms. S's mother began to view her as a welcome friend and tutor to her daughter.

Ms. T next invited Ms. S to a sports training seminar that was out of town and required an overnight stay. Ms. S's mother was not at all concerned when she learned that her daughter and Ms. T would be sharing a hotel room. The following week, Ms. S came home with a brand new iPhone that Ms. T had given her as a gift. This puzzled Ms. S's mother, who then called Ms. T, mostly with concerns that she should offer to repay Ms. T for giving her daughter such an expensive gift. Ms. T explained that no payment was necessary, as she had obtained the phone at half price through a college female basketball recruiter she knew.

Ms. T and Ms. S continued to spend increasing amounts of time together outside of school hours. Ms. S's mother finally became quite concerned when a friend informed her that her daughter had seen Ms. T and Ms. S embracing each other in an empty classroom. When Ms. S's mother confronted her about this news, Ms. S became highly upset. After a lengthy, volatile argument, Ms. S openly proclaimed that she was "in love" with Ms. T and wanted to live with her after graduating from high school.

Ms. S's mother complained to the school principal and threatened legal action if the school did not take steps to remedy the situation. The school immediately began an investigation, in cooperation with school district attorneys. The investigation uncovered evidence suggesting that Ms. T had victimized at least two other female students over the past five years. Initially, Ms. T told the principal that she and Ms. S had been involved in a "mutually consenting relationship" and that no one was "harmed." When the principle began speaking in terms of her termination, Ms. T recanted and said that there was never any sexual activity between her and Ms. S. Subsequently,

Ms. T hired an attorney and made known her intentions to sue the school district for defamation and wrongful termination should they decide to fire her.

This case presents some common themes observed in cases of educator sexual misconduct. Ms. T selected a student who suffered from low self-esteem and relatively less parental oversight than other students. In the wake of her parents' divorce and her mother's new focus on dating, Ms. S was highly vulnerable to Ms. T's efforts to make her feel special. Ms. T skillfully negotiated extra time with Ms. S and began to win her trust and affection with gifts and praise. Ms. T was able to groom Ms. S's mother by assuring her that she was a trustworthy adult who was interested in her daughter's future. Given her current situation, Ms. S's mother was only too happy to have an additional adult role model for her daughter.

Ms. T successfully isolated Ms. S on an overnight outing and likely took advantage of Ms. S's natural sexual curiosity and uncertainty. Once Ms. T had established her relationship with Ms. S, Ms. S was vehemently opposed to giving up what she perceived as a "loving" relationship that had made her feel worthwhile. Thus, it is likely that Ms. S would refuse to testify or otherwise report the truth to authorities if it meant an adverse outcome for Ms. T. The long-term consequences of this type of sexual abuse for Ms. S will be difficult to predict and will likely depend on factors such as her preabuse psychological vulnerabilities as well as her postabuse emotional support system. There will certainly be the risk that Ms. S might develop symptoms of depression and anxiety. She may also encounter difficulties trusting authority figures and problems with sexual intimacy in her future relationships.

Besides the legal complexities presented by this situation, there is also the issue of the risk Ms. T may pose to future students. If Ms. T continues to teach, yet is unable to see her relationship with Ms. S as a violation of professional boundaries, her risk of repeating the behavior is likely to persist. Ms. T will continue to have a lack of insight into how she abused the power imbalance and trust inherent in her teacher role. Thus, as long as Ms. T views her behavior as a "consensual" love affair, her risk will remain unmitigated. There is also the possibility that Ms. T does have some insight into the inappropriateness of the relationship but simply chooses to ignore it. This type of mind-set suggests the presence of at least some psychopathic traits, which would also serve as a risk enhancing factor.

## TOWARD PREVENTION

The acts of public school teachers within the course of their employment are considered to fall within in the "color of law" coverage of Title 42 USC §1983 (Valente, 1990). In cases of teacher sexual misconduct, the abuse may be argued as amounting to a deprivation of the student's constitutional right to

**TABLE 3** Recommended Prevention Strategies

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- District and school level policies prohibiting educator sexual misconduct
- Standardized hiring practices
- Standardized screening methods and criminal background checks
- Standardized investigative practices in response to allegations
- Development of a centralized reporting agency and registry
- Report all allegations to law enforcement and child protective services
- Regular training on educator sexual misconduct and prevention
- Enact state statutes on educator sexual misconduct and prevention

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Sources: Fauske, Mullen, & Sutton (2006); Shakeshaft (2004); Sutton (2004).

bodily security. Thus, school districts and supervisors may be found liable for the sexual misconduct of teachers. Most plaintiffs cite Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any organization that receives federal funding (Sutton, 2004). In *Doe v. Warren Consolidated Schools* (2003), a school district was held liable under *both* § 1983 and Title IX since administrators were found to have been aware of the teacher's long history of sexual misconduct yet failed to act preventively. Therefore, school districts have a legal duty to safeguard students from educator sexual misconduct.

School districts should consider developing and implementing sound prevention measures to prevent educator sexual misconduct. In particular, Title IX regulations require schools to publish policies on sexual discrimination and proper grievance procedures. District and individual school policies should explicitly define and prohibit educator sexual misconduct. Regular training and in-service programs should be established to educate staff, parents, and students about behaviors that are unacceptable as well as of potential signs of educator sexual misconduct. The details of mandatory reporting should be made explicit. School districts should carefully review and standardize employee screening and hiring practices. Table 3 provides a list of suggested prevention efforts to be considered by school districts but should not be taken as exhaustive.

## CONCLUSIONS

In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have.

—Attributed to Lee Iacocca

Teaching is one of the most noble and time honored of professions. As such, a substantial amount of trust is granted to the profession. For the

majority of their children's waking hours, parents hand over primary responsibility for shaping and modeling the latent potential of young minds. The vast majority of teachers work tirelessly to ensure the education of future generations. There are, however, a select few who use the power inherent in the teacher role to target vulnerable children for sexual abuse. School districts face serious dilemmas in cases of teachers who sexually abuse students. They often find themselves caught between the need to take decisive action against the offending teacher and the teacher's threats of legal action against the school district.

Since the issue of educator sexual misconduct has developed into a national child safety issue, some states are beginning to enact statutes directed at the problem. Recently, the New York State Senate passed legislation that would require immediate decertification, without pay, of teachers upon conviction of a serious crime against a child (S.6296; Golden, 2007). The bill also includes measures to provide better training to school districts on the issue as well as improved prevention efforts. It is hoped that future research and education will lead to improved solutions and greater awareness of early warning signs of grooming by teacher sexual abusers.

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